

## Right-Side Up by Jessica\_Bones\_Winchester

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**Summary:**

When Hopper and Joyce find Will in the Upside Down, they find someone else, too. Takes place at the end of season 1 and moves into the time between seasons 1 & 2.

## 1. Chapter 1

The incessant beeping pulled Sandra from her sleep. Her head ached. Her throat burned.

She opened her eyes with a gasp that caused a coughing fit, and the beeping grew more rapid.

"Easy now. Take it easy."

A nurse put a hand on her shoulder.

"Where am I?" she rasped out.

"You're being taken care of."

She looked around. A hospital. She was in a hospital.

"I was...."

A memory of darkness, shrieks, and screams flashed.

"You were, what?"

"What's wrong with me?"

"You've suffered mild hypothermia and severe dehydration." The nurse checked her fluids and her vitals. "I'll let the doctor know you're awake."

"What's the date?"

"The date?"

"Yes."

"November thirteenth."

A week. It had been almost a week. She squeezed her eyes shut against the memories, but it didn't help. The sounds were embedded in her brain. She still felt the cold just under her skin, though her hands were warm as she covered her face.

She jumped as the door opened.

"I'm sorry. Didn't mean to startle you. I'm Dr. Owens." He pointed to an officer who leaned on the wall by the door. "That's Chief Hopper. Do you mind if he stays?"

She shook her head.

"Great. First things first. Can you tell me your name?"

"Sandra."

"Nice to meet you, Sandra. What about your last name?"

"Hughes."

Chief Hopper wrote it in a small notepad.

"So," Dr. Owens said. "It seems you were lost in the woods."

"No. No, I..." She glanced back and forth between the two men. They seemed to be waiting for something. "You wouldn't believe me," she said.

"Try me." Chief Hopper pushed away from the wall.

"Where am I?"

"In a hospital," Owens said.

"No, where? What city?"

"You're in Hawkins, Indiana," Hopper said.

"I'm still in Hawkins?"

"Did you think you left?"

"Oh, I left."

"Where did you go?"

"You won't believe me."

"Miss Hughes, I've had a hell of a week. You'd be surprised what I believe. Where'd you go?"

—

"We have to contain her," Dr. Owens leaned back in the chair at his desk.

"Define 'contain,' because it sounds an awful lot like you want to make her disappear."

"Chief, I would hope you trust me more than that."

"Trust is earned."

"I'm talking about getting her to stay quiet in return for care, just like we're going to do for Will."

"She may not go for it."

"I think she will. She's already worried people won't believe her."

"And they won't."

"Most won't. It's the ones that would believe her that we have to worry about. We have to go back in and get her full story."

"Just me."

"I don't think so."

"She's hesitant to talk." Hopper leaned forward. "She's probably questioning her sanity. It'll put her more at ease if there's only one of us."

"And you think it should be you?"

"The guy that saved her from that hell hole? Yeah. I do."

—

The knock on the door startled her, and she slammed her fist on the bed.

"Yes?"

"Sorry. Can I come in?"

Chief Hopper stood halfway in the door until Sandra nodded.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired."

"Just tired?"

"Sore. Still cold."

Hopper pulled a blanket from a nearby cabinet and covered her all the way up to her neck.

"Better?"

Sandra sighed. "A little. Thank you."

He pulled a chair closer to her bed and sat with his hat in his lap.

"Do you think you can talk about it?"

She shrugged.

"You said before that you were 'still in Hawkins.' I don't claim to know everyone, but it's a pretty small town, and I don't recognize you."

"I was visiting an old friend on my way through Indiana."

"We checked. No one has reported you missing."

Sandra scoffed. "No. No one would."

"Not even your friend?"

"I was leaving. I was on my way out of town when... Anyway, she lives a few towns over. I was just passing through here. She probably doesn't even realize anything happened to me."

"You were driving?"

"Yes."

"What happened to your car?"

"I have no idea. It was a mess last I saw it."

"What do you mean?"

"It was late, and I was on this empty road practically surrounded by woods. And this... God, I don't know what that was. It slammed into the front of my car. At first I thought I hit a big dog or something, so I got out to check, but nothing was there."

"But you definitely hit something?"

"The front of my car was banged up. I tried to start it again, but it wouldn't. Then I heard this... like a clicking. Then a shriek. And I saw it."

"What was it?"

"I have no idea."

"Can you describe it?"

"It kind of looked like a person, but... deformed, and..."

"And?"

"Its face."

"What about it?"

"It didn't have one. It was more like one of those plants that open up. Like a giant bud."

Hopper rubbed a hand over his jaw and sighed.

"You don't believe me. I knew you wouldn't believe me!"

"No, I believe you."

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why do you believe me? I sound crazy!"

"Well, if you're crazy then so am I, because I was there, too."

"You were in that place?"

He nodded. "And I want to make sure no one else ends up there. So, I need you to tell me what happened after you saw it."

"I ran. I grew up around woods, so I know how to hide and stay aware. But I tripped on something in the dark, and I fell into this hole. I had the wind knocked out of me. When I could finally breathe ok, the hole was closed. I couldn't get back."

"Did you know there were other people in there with you?"

"I guessed there were. I could hear screams. People calling for help. And one name... Will."

"You heard Will?"

"I heard people calling for him. It sounded far away, and I couldn't react for some reason."

Hopper played with the rim of his hat.

"You're not telling me something," she said.

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs.

"Whatever it was that was out there... it got you. You were barely alive when we found you."

Sandra stared at Hopper, her eyes darting across his face before she shut them tight. The memory of the attack flashed, and was gone. She remembered nothing after that except...

"You saved me. You carried me out."

Hopper nodded and leaned back in his chair. Sandra stared at the floor, trying to remember more, but nothing would come. She covered her face with shaking hands, and Hopper took one.

"Hey. You're not alone in this, all right? You've got people here who understand, and want to help. In fact, we need to discuss what happens next."



## 2. Chapter 2

Hopper shut off the engine and put the key to Sandra's apartment in her hand.

"How do you feel about staying in Hawkins?"

She shrugged. "I guess there are worse places to be than a town where someone saved your life."

Hopper smirked. "Like Owens said, you'll be close by so they can help if you need it."

"Sure." She nodded and thumbed the key.

"You want me to walk you up?"

"No. You've done more than enough. I need to get used to being on my own again." She turned in her seat a bit. "I never really thanked you for getting me out of there."

Hopper shook his head.

"You saved my life, Chief Hopper. Thank you."

"You're welcome. And call me Hopper. No 'chief.'"

She smiled. "Got it."

Hopper pulled a business card from his wallet.

"You call me if you need anything." He jotted another number on the back of the card. "That's my home phone. Call me first, ok? Any time. Then we'll decide if the lab needs to know."

She nodded. "Thank you. For everything."

"Take care of yourself, Miss Hughes."

"Sandra," she said with a small smile.

"Sandra. I'll check on you soon."

She nodded and got out of the truck, then walked the two flights up to her apartment. The lab arranged for her things to be delivered, and a small sense of peace rushed through her at the familiar sight of her furniture. Though the idea of strangers packing her things made her uneasy.

She checked every closet, cabinet, and drawer. She eyed every shelf. Nothing seemed missing.

Two weeks showering and sleeping at a lab, always under close watch. It was nice to be alone, and a shower was her first mission.

—

Sandra screamed as she bolted upright and struggled to catch her breath. Her bedside lamp remained on all week as she slept. It didn't stop the nightmares, but it helped when she woke up in a sweat.

It was barely two in the morning, and she was wide awake, but exhausted. A grand total of ten hours of sleep the last three days had her run down.

After convincing herself she was safe, Sandra went to the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face, then stared at Hopper's card stuck in her mirror. He'd called the day before and insisted again that she call him if she needed anything. She thought about calling him every night, but did her fear constitute a need? No, not really.

She lay back down and tried to sleep, until a dog howled in the distance. It didn't quite sound like the other place, but it was close enough after her nightmare. She grabbed Hopper's card and climbed back under the covers with the phone. It took a few rings, but he answered.

"Hopper."

He sounded so tired she almost hung up.

"Hello?"

"Chief Hopper?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Sandra Hughes. I'm so sorry to bother you."

"No. No, you're fine. What's up?"

"I, uh... this is going to sound stupid, but... I've been having nightmares. I had a bad one tonight, and I just..."

"Give me ten minutes."

"For what?"

"To get there."

"No. I didn't mean for you to come out. I just needed to talk. I guess I just needed to hear someone else's voice."

"Well, you're gonna see my face, too. Be there soon."

—

"I brought the party." Hopper smiled as he held up a deck of cards and a six pack. "You play?"

"Depends on the game."

"Lady's choice."

"Poker?"

"Poker," he repeated with a smile.

"I'm not that good, but I know how to play. So..."

"Poker's fine. I forgot the bottle opener."

"I'll grab one."

Hopper glanced around the room and found her music collection. He was flipping through her albums when she came back and handed him an open beer.

"You pick," she said. "Just not too loud. Neighbors."

"You like this new stuff?"

"Some of it. Good music is good music."

"Yeah, well, good music is subjective, I guess. Ha! Here we go."

He got the Styx album going, then sat across from her at the table.

"I should warn you," she said, "beer usually makes me sleepy."

"Well, that's good, right?"

"Maybe." She sighed.

"Mind if I smoke?"

"I don't know. Does smoking keep you calm so you can bluff?"

Hopper laughed. "Calm, yes. Don't know if it helps with the bluffing."

"Hmmm." She grabbed the ashtray from the coffee table. "Guess we'll see."

They played until the album stopped, and hopper got up to change it.

"Would you mind if we just sat for a while?" She sat on the sofa and popped the top off of her third beer.

"No, I don't mind." He slipped the album back in its place then joined her with his own beer. "Getting tired?"

"I've been tired for days." She sighed.

"Not sleeping?"

She shook her head. "The nightmares come every night."

"That's not really surprising. What you went through... that was some traumatizing shit."

"I just want one good night's sleep."

"It'll get better. Give it time."

Sandra picked at the label on her bottle.

"Tell me something about you," she said.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. Did you grow up here?"

"I did."

"Tell me about that. What was Chief Hopper like in high school?"

He chuckled and lit a cigarette.

"I'll bet you were already a smoker."

"Guilty."

"You were a rebel, right?"

"I don't know about 'rebel,' but I certainly got into my fair share of trouble."

"Tell me."

Hopper sighed and ran his hand through his hair. He told her a few stories about cutting class, getting caught smoking or making out on school grounds. After a while he really started to reminisce. He leaned his head back and stared at the ceiling while he talked.

"So, we ran six blocks with this one guy on our tails, and he—"

Hopper turned his head to find Sandra asleep, her head back and tilted toward him.

"Well... I guess not everyone finds that story as exciting as I do."

He hesitated to move her, but he lay her down on the sofa and covered her with a blanket. He turned off the lights, then tossed a throw pillow on the floor and lay down next to the sofa. He would have to be up in a couple of hours. He'd wake her then to tell her he

had to leave.

—

Sandra gasped as she woke up to darkness.

"Oh my God. Oh my God!"

She fumbled for the lamp on the end table. It crashed to the floor, and she screamed as Hopper sat up.

"What's wrong?"

"Hopper! Oh my God." She held a hand to her chest and tried to steady her breathing.

"Are you all right?"

She shook her head then covered her face with her hands as tears spilled.

"Hey." Hopper sat next to her and pulled her into his arms. "You'll be ok."

A flash of the other place crossed Sandra's mind. This time, she remembered Hopper carrying her out. Being in his arms brought the memory back, and she felt safe for the first time in weeks.

"Wanna talk about it?" he asked.

"Not really."

"So... did you mean to kill your lamp?"

Sandra chuckled and Hopper eased his embrace until she pulled away.

"I've been sleeping with a lamp on. When I woke up in the dark..."

"You panicked."

"Yeah. The other place was always dark. Always."

"Sorry. I didn't know. I never would have turned it off."

"It's all right. When did I fall asleep?"

"Not sure. You must have gotten bored with my stories."

"I was enjoying those."

"Funny way of showing it."

Sandra laughed. "What time is it?"

"About 4:30."

She rubbed her forehead. "I know you have work. You can leave. I don't want to keep you up all night."

"Do I look tired to you?"

"You want the honest answer?"

"Damn." He chuckled. "All right. You win."

Sandra followed him to the door.

"Do yourself a favor and go right back to bed."

"I can go to bed. Doesn't mean I'll sleep."

"I get it. Call me if you need me."

"Thank you, Hopper."

"Any time."

### 3. Chapter 3

The nightmares got less intense as the next few weeks passed, but Hopper was at Sandra's apartment at least twice a week after hesitant late-night calls for company.

They learned a lot about each other, and Sandra considered him a friend. She wasn't sure he felt the same until he called her late one night.

"Hey." His voice broke.

"What's wrong?"

"Would you mind some company?"

"Not at all. Everything ok?"

"Just having a tough time. I'll explain when I get there."

He arrived looking a little more disheveled than usual. A lit cigarette already hung from his lips.

"What's wrong, Hopper?"

He slouched down on the sofa and sighed.

"I trust you. That's why I came here. I need to know that you'll keep this between us."

"Of course."

"Not even Joyce knows."

"Oh. Wow. Ok."

"I know you two have been talking, so—"

"No. I understand. Just us."

Hopper rubbed the heel of his hand up and down his thigh, digging in.



"There's this girl. She was involved in all the stuff that happened last month. She's got... abilities. She was being treated like a lab rat, and she escaped about the time that Will went missing."

"What kind of abilities?"

"She can move things with her mind, for one."

Sandra chuckled. "You're kidding."

Hopper just shook his head.

"Her abilities caused the opening that let that thing through."

"Is she dangerous?"

"She could be, but she's a sweet kid. She's got a big heart. She saved everyone by killing that monster. And I think she thought it would kill her, because her friends told me she said goodbye. And she disappeared right in front of them."

"Oh my gosh."

"I got a report after a while about a kid in the woods. So, I started trying to reach out to her, and... I found her. She's staying in a cabin I have."

"Why is it a secret?"

"Because the people at that lab... I don't trust them with her. The more people who know about her, the bigger the risk someone will slip."

"But you're telling me."

Hopper lay his head back and stared at her.

"Yeah."

"Wow. I don't know what to say."

"I trust you."

"Thank you. On the phone you said you're having a tough time. I get that this is big, but it doesn't seem like something that would really bother you that way."

He smirked. "I knew you'd see past all that."

"What's wrong, Jim?"

She'd only called him by his first name once before. The nightmares that night had been horrible, and she sobbed in his arms, begging him to make it all go away. Now, his name rolled from her tongue like it was what she always called him. To call him by his last name while he was clearly hurting just seemed cold.

"I told you about Sara."

"You did."

"Having El in my house, having to take care of this girl... she's about the age Sara would have been."

Tears filled his eyes, and Sandra wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

"I'm so sorry."

"I, uh... I was wondering if you would help me with her."

"How can I help?"

"She's alone most of the time. My hours are far from steady. She watches a lot of t.v. to try to learn things, so she stays out of trouble, but she needs more attention. And I've told her about you."

"You have?" She pulled away and took his hand instead.

"She asked me where I was going a couple of times. She doesn't always sleep. I told her I was going to help a friend, but she always wants to know more. So, I told her about you. She knows you were in the Upside Down."

"Is she awake now?"

He shook his head. "She was sleeping when I left."

"Maybe I can come over tomorrow and meet her."

"Something you should know about her."

"Other than the superpowers?"

She smiled and Hopper returned it.

"She's smart, but she was hidden from the world all her life. She was basically a prisoner. There's a lot she doesn't know, and she can seem a little naive."

"I'll keep that in mind."

Hopper sighed. "I guess I should get back." He squeezed her hand, then stood. "Thanks for letting me barge in here."

"Any time, Jim. Really."

"I'll pick you up tomorrow on my way home so you can meet her."

—

"El, come out. Someone's here to meet you."

She opened the door a crack, and stared at Sandra.

"Hi, El."

"El, this is Sandra."

The door opened wider. "Your friend?"

"Yep."

Eleven came out of her room slowly.

"You were in the Upside Down?"

"I was."

"Like Will."

"Yes."

"Sandra's going to stay for dinner." Hopper said. "You ok with that?"

Eleven shrugged.

"That's a yes." He smiled at her.

Dinner was just a t.v. dinner, but Sandra didn't mind. The longer she was there, the more Eleven relaxed. Hopper didn't treat her like she'd been sheltered, so neither did Sandra. She talked to her the way she would talk to any other kid her age.

The girl was insanely curious about everything. She repeated words she didn't know, and asked a lot of questions.

"Do you like Eggos?"

"I do," Sandra said. "With lots of maple syrup."

Eleven smiled.

"You can have Eggos in the morning," Hopper said.

Her smile faded. "Television."

"Yeah, ok. You can go watch television."

Eleven closed the door to her room.

"You're pretty good with her," Sandra said.

"Not in the slightest. What you saw was two people behaving themselves in front of a guest. Sometimes she just..." Hopper ran both hands through his hair. "She can be so stubborn."

"Not like you, right?"

He looked offended for the briefest moment before a smile spread across his face.

"Yeah. I guess so. Want a beer?"

"Sure."

"Music?"

She nodded.

"Albums are over there. You pick."

Sandra put on a John Denver album, then sat on the sofa. Hopper came back with the beers and handed one to her as he sat close enough that their arms touched.

"Any nightmares last night?"

"Not too bad."

"Good. Been keeping busy?"

Sandra stared at him. "What is this?"

"What is what?"

"These questions... It's like small talk."

"That's bad?"

"Hopper, we've had real conversations about serious shit. You really want to know how I keep busy all day?"

He started to shake his head, but nodded instead.

"Yeah. I do."

"Why?"

Hopper took a swig from his bottle, then shrugged.

"I like talking to you. It doesn't always have to be serious shit. For instance, what made you wear that shirt?"

Sandra looked down at her shirt and ran her fingers over the

neckline.

"I wanted to look nice."

"See? Nothing serious, but now I know that you wanted to look nice to meet El. That makes me happy."

Sandra almost fumbled. Why would he assume she meant El?

"Yeah. Had to make a good impression."

"So," he took her hand, "how have you been keeping busy?"